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The Development of the Graphic Arts, Illustrated from the Museum Collection of Prints.

First and Second Print Rooms.



Gothic "I," from the alphabet of Master "E. S." 15th century.

HE visitor, in going through the galleries of classical antiquities, is brought face to face with practically all of the Museum's possessions in this field of art. The main, the essential part of the collection, is permanently shown in the exhibition galleries. In the collection of prints conditions are reversed. But a very few of the thousands of prints contained in the Museum collection can be shown at any one time in the

print rooms up-stairs. It seems useful, even necessary, under these conditions, to call attention now and then to the wide range covered by the collection, and to the various phases of artistic development, which are rounded out and illustrated by the graphic arts.

The present exhibition is an attempt in this direction. Various periods have been illustrated by means of a few typical examples. In the centre of the First Print Room a few implements are shown, which are used in woodcut and wood-engraving, in engraving, etching, mezzotinting, and in lithography. Early Italian engraving, originating with the goldsmith's niello, is shown in Case 1. After the splendid series of prophets and sibyls typical of Botticelli's time, after the Tarocchi in Venice, engraving gained, at the hands of Mantegna (Case 2), a severe grandeur, tempered in time by the softer charms of Venetian art. The study of German technique led to Marc-Antonio's masterly rendering of Raphael's art (Case 4), but with the advancing sixteenth century the traditions of Italian excellence declined, though revived for a while by Agostino Carracci (Case 6). Etching was resorted to for hasty expression by a number of Italian artists (Cases 6 and 7). Some chiaroscuro prints in Cases 8 and 9 show how woodcut met the ever-present demand for color in the sixteenth century.

The technical skill of German fifteenth century engravers is apparent in a few early examples, especially in the work of Martin Schongauer (Case 11). With Dürer the period of highest excellence in German prints was reached (Cases 12 and 13). His genius influenced artists throughout the North, and it gave a new impulse to Italian engraving. The early sixteenth century was the

great era of German woodcut, illustrated in Dürer's vigorous, expressive work (Case 13), and the masterly, minute compositions of Holbein's famous "Dance of Death" (Case 15), which unfortunately cannot be shown in fine impressions. The growing influence of Italian art is visible in the skillful work of the so-called "Little Masters," the followers of Dürer (Case 14).

The seventeenth century belonged to the Netherlands. Following their earliest painter-engraver, Lucas van Leyden (Case 18), a period of commercial activity ripened the skill of engravers, who afterwards spread the fame of Rubens by excellent faithful interpretations of his works (Case 20). From Van Dyck's masterly portrait sketch and Visscher's vigorous work (Case 21) we turn to Rembrandt, that master of etching, whose powers are as evident in the slight suggestive sketch as in the finished plate full of subtle play of light and rich tonality (Cases 22 and 23). This period of Dutch and Flemish art is immensely fertile. Here we find the peasant scenes of Ostade (Case 25) and the landscape work of Ruysdael (Case 27), Zeeman's marines and Potter's cattle (Case 26).

In the Second Print Room, at the left on entering, a few examples of early French work are shown. The seventeenth century was the great period of French engraving. Here are Callot's plates (Case 34), with their multitudes of expressive figures, and Claude Lorrain's (Case 37) landscape etchings. The great exponents of portrait engraving follow: Morin, with his effective stipple-like manner; Edelinck, who brought technical mastery from his native Netherlands, and Robert Nanteuil (Case 40), who commands all the resources of the process, adding to them a fine artistic sensibility. In Masson's portraits (Case 40) technical perfection is more aggressively apparent, and the perfection of Drevet's grand "Bossuet" (Case 42) is somewhat marred by the attention devoted to the pompous setting. These few scattered examples suggest rather than illustrate the wealth of varied productiveness of the graphic arts in France.

The great period in England was the eighteenth century, with its unequalled flowering of mezzotint (Cases 49-56), a medium fit above all others to render the charm of the great English portrait painters and the genius of Turner. Bartolozzi and stipple engraving (Case 51) came in for a share of glory at the same period. With the nineteenth century the lithograph and wood-engraving appeared and the painter-etcher flourished. Here the wealth of material makes a choice extremely difficult. Among the prints shown Whistler is represented, and Haden and Méryon. But these modern artists are well enough known to need no further introduction. Perhaps this general review will remind visitors of the wealth of material awaiting their pleasure in the rooms of the Print Department, in the basement.

E. H. R.